

The Jedi Warrior Bond - part one - every saga has a beginning
by GM

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JEDI WARRIOR BOND

PART ONE

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. . . every saga has a beginning

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by

GM

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The first in a multi-part series on how and when Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan meet and form a bond through the Force. The strength of this bond saves their lives on numerous occasions and prepares them for their final moments together -- and beyond -- in SW:TPM

In this first story, the saga begins as Qui-Gon is drawn back to the Jedi Temple by a strong Force impression. There he meets Obi-Wan Kenobi, who discusses a mystical, magical myth called the Jedi Warrior Bond

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Rated -- G

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Not connected with the JA series.

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ORDER OF STORIES IN THE _JEDI WARRIOR BOND_ SERIES:

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. . . every saga has a beginning . . .

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Sanctuary

The Heart of Existence

Edges of Darkness

The Sorcerer and the Apprentice

Shadow on the Warrior Path

Bridge Over Troubled Water

Always

The Last Hope

The End of the Warrior Path

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PART ONE

The Force draws respected Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn back to the Jedi Temple. There he meets a young apprentice who impresses him with an unusual history lesson. And what is a Warrior Bond?

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To Qui-Gon Jinn, walking the muted, subdued corridors of the Jedi Temple was always like coming home spiritually as well as physically. His earliest memories -- many years ago -- were of life here in these sequestered rooms and halls where solemn Jedi Masters intoned and imparted galactic wisdom to the young. To a revered order of beings regarded throughout the known galaxy, as the keepers of peace and justice, the Temple was an appropriately reverent edifice.

In the last decade Qui-Gon returned to this Jedi haven only when summoned by the Jedi Council. Otherwise he preferred roaming from assignment to assignment, traveling to the far reaches of the Republic, fulfilling his calling as a Jedi and instrument of the Force. Anything to keep him from the memories and ghosts lingering here to haunt him.

Having just completed a mission of assistance for the leader of Alderaan, Jinn could have reported to the council, as usual, through communications channels. His next assignment, in all probability, would have been given to him immediately. Instead, Qui-Gon exercised the unusual option of returning to the spiritual center -- the Temple. The return was not of his own choosing. Unmistakably the Force had drawn him here.

Notifying the appropriate clerks of his arrival, he knew that soon enough the Council would be made aware of his presence here and summon him for an audience. No doubt that was when they would tell him -- whatever it was he was here for. Perhaps they did not yet even know. Often the Force pushed, influenced and guided the Jedi seemingly without reason or sense. In those times Master Yoda, the most powerful Jedi in Qui-Gon's lifetime, would recited the well known adage about paying attention to the Living Force.

The quote was one the young student, then apprentice Jinn heard often in his formative years. Now that he held the level of a Master the quote was still something Yoda and other Council members advised him with annoying regularity. Perhaps if he had adhered more to those teachings he would understand why the Force drew him back to his roots here at the Temple. Perhaps this was an example of a hidden disadvantage for a maverick Jedi. He was usually adept at tuning into the Living Force, but was not so talented with seeing into the future.

Over ten thousand Jedi were counted in the ranks and obviously there was not room in the Temple for everyone. Transient groups for the most part, Masters and Apprentices not regularly assigned to Coruscant were housed in temporary quarters. Since Jedi maintained a spartan, austere lifestyle it was never a problem to survive comfortably in guest housing.

Unpacked and refreshed from his journey, Qui-Gon looked out his small viewport, observing the hectic, congested sky of Coruscant and longing for the freedom and space offered in less populated spots in the galaxy. Restlessly he paced the small quarters, knowing he had been brought back here for a reason. Solving puzzles was not only part of his vocation, but a skill he excelled at. Knowing himself very well, he understood he was avoiding the solution to this puzzle because he thought he would probably dislike the answer to why the Force wanted him back at the Temple.

Walking out those closed doors might connect him with the answer immediately and he wanted to avoid that fate as long as possible. On the other hand, he could remain here, drive himself to distraction in the small room, and be summoned by the Council. Then they would tell him his destiny and he would have backed himself into a corner.

While still a young student in these halls, Qui-Gon had accepted, more easily than his Masters, that he was a free and independent spirit. His schooling had been tests of patience for his Masters and him. How anxious he was to be through with the learning and get on with the active purpose of a Jedi life.

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'Be mindful of the now.' Yoda never tired of the admonition.

Never one to deny the Force, Destiny or good instincts, Qui-Gon left the room to wander the corridors of the Jedi refuge. In his occasional visits to the Temple Qui-Gon had never felt this pressing sense in the Force that now almost pushed him to whatever the future held for him.

As he passed others in the hall he could feel the subtle sense of their speculation. What brought the mysterious, reclusive, powerful Jedi Qui-Gon Jinn back to the Temple? Was he to be given the long-rumored seat on the Council?

Three times Jinn had been told, by a long-suffering Council, that he was more than worthy of a position among the twelve most powerful Jedi -- except for his continued insistence on extreme independence, radical actions and stubborn rebellion. Qui-Gon's wisdom, experience and endowment of the Force were formidable. Three times he had been paid the ultimate compliments and the ultimate censure by being denied a seat on the Council.

Three times he had breathed a sigh of relief. Never had he desired to sit with the exalted beings that were the supreme authority on the Force in the galaxy. His destiny was in the stars, in the activity of working in hot spots all over the Republic. Doing good in a direct fashion, not vicariously through other Jedi Knights, was his strength.

As he passed other Knights or Masters with their students -- Padawans -- he gave polite nods. On a near non-sensory level he could hear the whispered speculations of why Master Qui-Gon Jinn was back at the Temple. As revered and spiritual as Jedi were, gossip was not above them and the Temple always rippled with tales of the latest exploits, and occasional blunders, of the various Knights. Not all Knights were famous or even known at the Temple. Adversely, some were notorious, and he supposed he fit into that category.

His amble brought him to one of the many training rooms available in the student wing of the Temple. Pausing, Jinn watched through a doorway as four teams of students practiced lightsabre dueling. True, the unique sabre owned only by Jedi was a weapon, but the Jedi Order had elevated it to an art object, using it in well choreographed stunts and stylish dances that were meant to be defensive though were often deadly. Even with callow initiates the duels were poetry in

motion and Qui-Gon watched in appreciative amusement as the various teams executed their prancing and parrying with varying degrees of talent, skill and grace.

Unbidden came the speculation of the other reason he might have been prodded to the Temple. To take a Padawan. Not every Knight became a Master to a Padawan. Only some Masters were honored with the ultimate testament of their place in the Jedi Order -- to teach and train a young and fresh apprentice -- a Padawan.

Every Padawan was assigned a Master, and in most cases the Council and the Force made the selection. There was the old story about the Jedi Warrior Bond --where the pure jurisdiction of the Force mutually drew the Master warrior and his pupil together -- but no one really believed that anymore. When he was an idealistic student Jinn had hoped the Warrior Bond was real. Perhaps even when he became a Master for the first time. After the disaster of his second apprentice -- well -- there was no more idealism left inside Jinn's pragmatic, still wounded heart.

The arduous work of being a Padawan under the strict guidance of his Master, then the hard reality of life as a Knight, faded some of that idealism -- that faith in magic -- from his system. Twice before he had been a Master. It took the Dark Side to knock all the enchantment out of his life -- to jolt him free of any mystical misconceptions of the Force. When his second Padawan had succumbed to the Dark Side Qui-Gon had dropped out of frequenting the Temple, become a virtual recluse, and denounced ever being Master to a Padawan again. If that was why the Force brought him back here, Qui-Gon would consider ignoring such a prompting. A new Padawan was the last thing that he needed in his life.

Involuntarily Qui-Gon's lip twitched with appreciation as his attention was drawn to two students on the far side of the room -- the team by far the most exciting and skilled students. The acrobatic skill of the trim student with the longish sandy hair drove all unpleasant memories from Qui-Gon. The Humanoid boy seemed old enough to be ready to leave the Temple and be taken by a Master. He moved with a grace foreign to his approximate twelve years and wielded the light sabre in his hand like a dancing partner. When the shorter, more stout, but stronger Humanoid opponent drove an attack, the leaner young man skipped aside with light feet. The shorter one would push and parry and the taller one would flip in a somersault over the foe and with an easy grace tumble back to land gracefully, ready for the next move.

The two swirled around the room, seemingly charged with never ending energy. Like trickles of light echoing off a blazing star, Qui-Gon could feel the pulse vibrating from the two boys as they jumped and parried across the mat. There was more than just skill at work here, because the finely attuned Master could feel the radiance of the Force working as the youths battled. One or both of them were very strong in the Force. The taller, more athletic student grew impatient, however, and Qui-Gon noted with amusement that he was taking more risks, becoming more confident and fancy in his style.

Pinching his lip with his fingers, Jinn smiled, certain the pretentious boy with the flashy style and longish, sandy hair whipping around his face would soon be dealt a mock-fatal blow with

his enemy's low charged lightsabre. The stout boy had methodically, relentlessly driven his opponent with tenacious vigor, pushing the taller boy back to a corner. As the attacker lunged to what seemed to be a certain hit the sandy-haired boy flipped up, feet kicking off the side wall, arched over his foe, twisting to land on his feet at the opponent's back. The broad shouldered boy jerked around quickly, tangling his feet in an awkward slant and losing balance. Stumbling, his lightsabre tipped back and was about to burn him on the shoulder.

As deftly as a ballet dancer, the tall boy's sabre flicked his opponent's sabre out of the way, to harmlessly land on the floor, powered off. The shorter boy was now on the ground on his knees. Snickers rippled around the room from the other students already finished with their battles. With curiosity, Qui-Gon wondered how the flashy, over-confident boy would chide the clumsy one. Ego-driven youth could be cruel and unforgiving of others not as skilled, dexterous or lucky as they. In the ostentatious battle the lean youth had definitely drawn on not only the Force, but also a degree of unnecessary showmanship and plain, old-fashioned luck.

The taller one ignored the rest of the students. He powered down his sabre and reached out a hand. "Good fight, Kyton. You really fooled me with that new strategy." It was sarcastic, but easy humor. With an indulgent grace he flipped the fallen sabre hilt off the floor, caught it in his free hand and held it out to its owner. "You won't fool me so easily next time." A dry, casual warning that the match would be decided more on skill next time than luck.

From the far side of the training room came an instructing Master Qui-Gon did not know, announcing an end to the day's class. All students were reminded to report for training tomorrow at the usual time for final trials. The students left through a door on the other side of the room. Thoughtfully Qui-Gon studied the remarkably generous youth whose flash and ego seemed inconsistent with his magnanimous nature.

A few of the students congregated, whispering -- obviously gossiping about the two flamboyant fencers -- but the lean fighter gave them no more than a glance of silent but distinct disapproval. Striding out of the room with confidence, the youth darted a glance in Jinn's direction. So, the young man knew he had an audience. With a neutral expression the young man disappeared.

"Entertaining the young are." A gravelly voice at hip level nearly startled the Master. It wasn't easy to sneak up on a Jedi, but in his defense Qui-Gon reminded he had been absorbed in the fight.

"Impressive skills say you so, Master Qui-Gon?"

Jinn turned and looked down -- far down -- to the small Jedi Master, Yoda, who stood beside him. "Entertaining," he assessed his deep, lyrical voice appreciative but not praising. He had given acclamation once to a flamboyant, confident Padawan. Never again.

"Intrigued I am that you arrive now, Qui-Gon." Yoda started a leisurely pace down the corridor, Jinn walking slowly alongside. "Expected this was not."

A Master of the Force, the little green creature was also considered a skilled master of sarcasm. Qui-Gon recognized it when he heard it

from the withered alien. "Really?" He could hold his own in the irony department.

A rattling cackle-laugh proved Yoda's sense of humor. "Summoned you have been." It was a certainty.

With nearly equal parts reservation and relief, Qui-Gon assumed the head of the Council referred to an audience with the twelve Jedi Masters. Without offering a direct acknowledgement that the Force had indeed guided him here, he deflected with a question. "Then the Council has an assignment for me?"

"Mission we have not for you." Yoda stopped, his ears curling down in perplexity. "Expect one you did?"

Qui-Gon would never lie to any Jedi, let alone Master Yoda. Neither did he want his private, intimate dealings with the Force to be exposed, even to an old friend such as the little Master. "I did not know."

"Come here for other purposes have you." It was a certainty.

Expression as cloudy as his heart, Qui-Gon refused to accept the assumption. "I'm sure something will come up. You know that I am available."

"I know two students become Padawans soon. Available you should be."

"No." The rude denial was abrupt, even harsh. Qui-Gon's face was as cold as his soul, as his eyes. "No, I will not."

Lips curled, eyes narrowed, the oldest, wisest Master stared at the commanding Jinn with a touch of compassion, a degree of knowing patience. "Impulsive still you are Qui-Gon Jinn. Ready to embrace the future at great risk."

Bristling, Qui-Gon's jaw tightened. "The risk is being a Master."

Yoda's ears flicked. "Mindful of the Living Force you are. Know you well enough to follow it. Rebellious you be often, Qui-Gon, but never renounced the Force you have. If a Padawan you will not take, but are meant to have, you will resist the Force not in this."

Waves of warm, tingling Force rippled over Qui-Gon's skin, chilling him to the bone. No, he would not resist the Force, nor would he knowingly act against the power that guided and directed his life. But how could he be meant to have another Padawan? Reluctant as a Master, his first student Padawan had been unremarkable, suitable and their partnership had lasted six years until Dolon Kree became a Knight.

A little more comfortable the second time, he had chosen a student who had been much like the tall, sandy haired youth fencing moments ago. Physically, they were not too similar, but the confidence, the style, the nerve was a reverberation -- not a copy -- but an echo of his ill-fated Padawan who had been seduced by the Dark Side. His close association with flamboyant students was at an end.

Rarely mentioned, Jedi did occasionally turn to the Dark Force. Power, authority, will-bending skills were heady traits that no being could truly understand until experienced. Jedi were carefully trained and screened before reaching the level of Padawan learner. To be mentored under the tutelage of a skilled master Jedi was a commitment of years on both sides. Never undertaken lightly, it was always considered with cautious selection, meditation and confirmation from the Force.

Master and Padawan sometimes felt an initial, instinctive connection through the Force. More commonly a member of the Council screened the students preparing for their Padawan training, and though the Force, chose a Master compatible in personality and method. If only the old tale of the Warrior Bond was true -- a Master and Padawan unmistakably drawn together by the Force -- the Force binding them mentally, spiritually, in a unity of purpose and a future of harmony. If only he still believed in fairy tales.

"Another Padawan I am not ready to take."

Without giving Yoda a chance to debate, Qui-Gon turned and strode away, briskly fleeing the field of battle. Impulsively, Qui-Gon had selected his last Padawan -- basing his choice on the flash and daring of the youth. The Council had agreed. The Force was in weak agreement. All too soon his young protégé fell victim to the easy, Dark power available to those who abandoned honor in exchange for domination.

Now disturbed, Qui-Gon stalked through the corridors of the Temple, seeking far reaches of the complex where he would encounter few people. He could not go back to his quarters and meditate -- it would be too easy to hear the Force there. Somewhere there must be a place where he could hide from the wisdom of Yoda and the accountability of the Force.

No, he would not deny the Force, but he was capable of deflecting it if possible. Two students ready to be assigned as Padawans. By tomorrow morning he would catch a transport out of here. There would be no Padawan for him. That would not be active rebellion against the Council or the Force -- just a diversion.

His feet seemed to take him to the perfect place. Secluded, remote, few ventured this far into the back rooms of the Temple to study relics. In his youth, this old library had been a refuge for the rebellious and inquisitive Jinn. Here, on tall shelves, they had original bound books that one could hold in hands, feel the texture of the old, brittle pages and smell of the mustiness; the sense of amassed knowledge and grime of ages at his fingertips. These were tactile connections to the legends, myths and core beliefs of the ancient Jedi. Few understood the treasure in these walls, but it was there and he felt better just opening the huge, tall doors and stepping into the room.

No where in the galaxy felt like this. With slow, ambling gait he strode past the low sofas near the front door. Walking down the nearest aisle he studied the towering shelves, noted the alcoves ringing the room, meandering past titles -- favorably recollected or intriguingly mysterious. Feeling guided, as if pulled by an invisible string, he arrived at the ancient history section. Almost knowingly

feeling the Force, he stopped short when he noted someone already in the deep, dark aisle.

A young man with light hair lay on the floor. With his hand he waved the air, obviously using the Force to select a book from one of the top shelves. The old tome floated aimlessly, slowly down, as if the young man was toying with the manipulative power. Eyes closed the boy delicately fingered the air, murmuring -- reading the pages of the closed book -- with the power of the Force.

"Galactic Republic -- Jedi Council -- Jedi legends -- ah," he whispered with satisfaction.

In pleasant, subtle waves the Force reached Qui-Gon, bringing an involuntary smile to his lips. From a long ago past a mischievous and ages-buried Sprite reared its head in his conscience. Without moving a muscle Qui-Gon used his considerable power of the Force to override the boy's orchestration and the heavy book dropped onto the student's stomach with a thud.

"Ooofff!"

Coughing through the dust, he sat up, brushing grime from his tunic. Picking up the dense volume he addressed it with a wry twist of his face. "Well, you must have weighty wisdom indeed to be that heavy!"

A laugh sputtered out of Qui-Gon.

The sandy haired, red-faced youth -- the flashy sabre fighter from the training room -- jumped up in surprise and turned to face the intruder. "Oh! Qui-Gon Jinn! Uh -- I mean Master -- Master Jinn." After a curt bow he drew in a breath to say something then grimaced and sighed. "I suppose you'll tell me I deserved that for being lazy and not climbing up a ladder."

Trying to judge a Master's thoughts? Cheeky, Jinn labeled with amusement. And a pawky sense of humor. The Master didn't want to reward his arrogance, but the boy was naturally engaging and self-effacing. Two charming traits that probably gave him many advantages in the Temple. The humor probably pushed him farther into popularity with students and teachers alike.

Qui-Gon's eyes narrowed, purposely conveying his most stern expression. "Do you always try to predict the future, student?"

"No." His eyes sparkled. "Just anticipate. Teachers usually tell me what I've done wrong." His lips quirked. "I just thought I'd save you the trouble."

An eyebrow shot up in amusement and he covered his mouth with his hand to hide a quick grin. "You sound a rebellious sort. And how is it you know my name, student -- ??"

Standing tall the youth approached. Sensing deep respect, confidence, Qui-Gon was fascinated by the young man. "Obi-Wan Kenobi, Master." In deference he gave a slight bow of his head. "Every student in the Temple knows the greatest Jedi Master and swordsman of our time!"

The exaggeration was not meant to be flattering, just honest. Jinn tried to close down his senses, to stop absorbing so much from Kenobi, and was startled to find he was already tuned low for reception of impressions. What he was getting was the student's strong broadcasting of subconscious praise.

"You're a hero of the Hypersapce Wars and" His adulation trailed off when he saw the shadow pass through Jinn's deep blue eyes. "Uh -- and I know that great Jedi don't usually want to talk about battles -- because Jedi are warriors second, keepers of the peace first." The quotes rushed out of him in breathless rapidity and at the end he offered a faltering smile.

Flattered at the admiration, disturbed that Obi-Wan could reach so intimately to his feelings, Qui-Gon struggled to define an emotion, mask it, and sort out a question among the many puzzles that naturally sprang from the youth's gregarious observations. "What is it you are doing here, student Kenobi? This must be a very dull place for someone as energetic as you." It was meant as a mild censure for arrogance.

"I enjoy these old books. They have intriguing data in them." The youth took it as a compliment and offered a sly, self-assured grin. Fitting his charming personality, his voice was deep and mellow, already changed to an adult timbre. "I noticed you watching our training. It must be boring for a great Jedi to see such amateurs playing with lightsabres."

Remembering the agile youth as anything but boring with his flips, summersaults and dashing style, Jinn could think only of another youth who had craved the excitement of the battle and allowed the seduction of might to corrupt him to the Dark Side. In his mind the conceit of over-confidence was the beginning step to a Dark path.

"I see arrogance where caution and patience would have been more suited."

If he had slapped Kenobi in the face it could not have been more startling. The sharp reproval whipped the youth like a blaster strike and he flinched, visibly stung. He dropped his gaze. "My apologies, Master. I did not think it inappropriate to be -- creative -- in my training."

Ashamed of his unjust mental comparisons, with his own impatience, Qui-Gon deflected the conversation. "You do not need to address me so formally. I am not your Master."

Kenobi glanced up, green eyes uncertain, wavering, then boldly firming to take a risk. "No -- I mean yes -- Master Jinn." He hesitated, uncertain only for an instant, then plunged ahead, obviously not wanting to waste a golden opportunity in a one-on-one with a hero. "You are the greatest Master of all. It is said your understanding of the Force is unequalled."

Now embarrassed, Qui-Gon dared to hold the admiring look, feeling an incredible need to not turn away from the uncomfortable praise, to not back away from a student so enchanting. There was little he could say to the unabashed adulation so again he deflected.

"So, young Kenobi, what is it you find so intriguing in these old books?"

Obi-Wan held out the dusty volume. "This ancient text on the beginning of the Jedi order." He flashed a grin. "Well, not history." He searched for a word and delivered it with a wry touch of humor. "Fables or myths some of my teachers call them."

"The old tales of magic and enchantment?" Jinn brightened. Many times he had read those lyrical yarns of the origins of the Jedi, the Force and the Republic. It was likely he had held this book in his own hands when he was Kenobi's age and thumbed through the dusty, timeless worlds of sorcerers and magicians. "Why do they interest you?"

"I have taken the apprentice trials. I will soon be assigned a Master." Fleetingly an embarrassed flush wisped across his cheeks. He stared at the book instead of at the Master's probing eyes. "I know there are legends -- about Master's and Padawans. Old and forgotten stories."

Qui-Gon looked away, concentrating on the faded cover of the decrepit book. So Obi-Wan was one of the initiates ready to leave the student level and advance to Padawan under the tutelage of a Master. As the Force tingled his skin he fought to ignore the rising anticipation shivering his blood and racing along his spine. He dared not look up to see if there was some kind of reciprocity for the youth. Such instant bonds were rare and Qui-Gon refused to believe he would be unfortunate enough to be party to one.

Again he deflected, his voice as steady as possible. "And which volume is this?"

Kenobi held it out, proffering it to the elder. "It's supposed to contain stories of the Jedi Warrior Bond. Have you heard of it?"

"Old superstitions."

His voice was dry and cracked. Warrior Bond. The most elevated level of the Force to be found between Master and Padawan. A joining of spirit and force and ideals that merged the two into a single unit with uncommon strength and hidden reserves of power. A myth. A foolish legend. Such idealistic relationships did not exist between Master and student. He might have believed in the myth once. Before the Dark Side took his Padawan -- brought him to his knees -- humbled him to the soul.

"Nothing but old stories." His condemnation was clipped, harsh. "Do not waste your time with such nonsense."

"I always wanted to believe it was true." Obi-Wan sighed, flinching slightly under the ruthless denunciation. Still, persistent, foolishly relentless of his goal, he seemed determined to relay his dreams to the older Jedi. "My teachers -- sometimes in cursing --remind me the Force is strong in me. Rebellious seems an interchangeable word they use as well." Drollness edged his tone. "They tell me I need a strong Master to train me if I am ever to channel my Force and become a Knight." Serious, his voice dropping to intone his sincerity, Kenobi stepped closer. "I hoped there would be

a Master -- someone like me -- someone I could connect with like no one I've ever known before." He drew in a breath. "I would like to believe that could happen."

Deny. Deflect. "It is a tale, young man." His voice harsh. "Being an apprentice, or a Master, has nothing to do with magic."

To disavow the concept he grabbed for the book, intending to fly it back up to its tall shelf. When he touched it a shock jolted through his hand and arm and seemed to vibrate to his very core. Both holding the book for an eternal moment, they held each other's eyes, the Force flowing back and forth, confirming profound certainties for both. One received a clear understanding that his wildest imaginings could come true. The other received the confirmation that his worst expectations might come true.

Qui-Gon's fingers, numb with cold shock, dropped the book. Out of amazed surprise Obi-Wan's fingers went limp and the book fell from his hands with a muted thud. The physical action jolted Jinn and he stepped back, staring at Kenobi, flashes of energy coursing his system. Abruptly he spun around, taking quick strides out of the library.

Breathless, awed and confused, Kenobi backed against the shelves, staring after the Master. When he bent to retrieve the book some time later, he noted the pages had fallen open to the old, faded drawing of a tall man and a shorter youth fighting side by side with lightsabres. In tandem -- battling Master and Padawan -- exemplified the unity and link of the Jedi Warrior Bond. With shaking knees he sank to the floor and started reading an old, amazing myth.

Long legs marching the halls of the Temple with a quick, strident pace, Qui-Gon coursed remote corridors, trying to lose himself in the vastness of the complex. No matter how fast he walked, where he tread, there was no escaping his thoughts. He could not run from the memory of the Force as it whipped through his system with a strength and surety he had not felt in -- that he had never felt before.

Derisively he dismissed young Kenobi's adoration, but privately admitted to well knowing the ways of the Force. He had felt the comfort of the Force in times of pain and stress. The might of the Force in battle. The mercy of the force when he needed compassion and understanding. It had never failed him. Except for that one incredibly rash period in his life when his apprentice fell to the Dark Side and Qui-Gon had been too blind, or prideful, or arrogant to stop the descent.

Years after that agonizing ordeal Jinn could not think of taking an apprentice again. The pain had been too great. He had invested too much in his pupil, given too much of himself. When his Padawan turned it was as if part of Jinn died. Now the Force was telling him there was a Padawan for him. Not just as a usual Master, but one with an already formidable connection to him. A Warrior Bond? Qui-Gon sneered at the thought even as chills rippled his skin.

How could he deny what he was feeling? What the Force was telling

him? How could he take another youth into his life, let alone his heart? Shattered and cold from the last betrayal, Qui-Gon had nothing left to offer a Padawan. To succeed, a partnership between Master and Padawan needed common respect, trust and faith backing the necessary undercurrent of the Force. Ideally, the partnership should grow to be as meaningful and close as a father and son, a father and daughter, a mother and son -- whatever the appropriate relationship -- the love and commitment had to be there as the foundation of the relationship or it would never work.

His first student he had cared for, taught and trained, his affection and regard for her profound and complete, but something less than he would expect to find for a daughter. Perhaps because Qui-Gon was by nature a loner, an individualist, he had not comfortably fit into the familial role. Doing his duty as a Master, however, the girl grew into an honorable Knight.

With his second student Jinn had tried to be the father, the mentor that other Masters were to their Padawans. Soon his hopes and efforts were crushed quickly. No one in the Council blamed him. How could they, he was the great Qui-Gon Jinn? The servant of the Force. The blind fool.

Qui-Gon could not give that trust and hope another time. This time the Force was wrong. He did not have a heart left to devote to another Padawan. In the quiet hours of the night he stopped, weary and troubled, curling up at a fountain at the back of the massive gardens in the high levels of the Temple. Too tired to meditate properly, he hoped he would find a sense of peace in this tranquil setting. Enough serenity to cling to and return to his quarters and sleep. In the morning he would leave and go somewhere far from the Council to receive a remote assignment. No meddling Masters, no engaging students, no threats to his sovereignty and isolation.

"Disturbed the Force is around you Qui-Gon."

Remaining still, Jinn didn't know what to say in response.

"Discover why you are here have you." Not a question.

Undoubtedly Yoda knew his inner secrets, too. Should he deny the truth or characteristically meet it head-on and bluntly, accepting the worst. What would the worst be in this case? Unable to find the words he nodded.

"Old lessons could I speak. Know them well enough. Forget them you do sometimes when your pain is too great."

Jinn winced, hating his old anguish to be so obvious.

"Be mindful of the now, Qui-Gon. Release the past. Do not dread the future. Trust in the Force."

It was ridiculous that such trite quotes could fit his confusion and doubt so perfectly. Shouldn't a _'great'_ Jedi master be above these petty fears and hurts? He reasoned he would never be free of so many faults inherent to his race. Stupidity was not listed among his problems.

"Release the blame. No fault of yours that your Padawan turned to the Dark Side. Chose he did his own path."

"I couldn't stop him. I was his Master! I should have seen it coming! I should have stopped him!"

Yoda sighed and shook his head. "To train. Not to command is a Master's life. Seduced he was. Not strong enough. Not your fault. Let it ruin not your future, Master Qui-Gon."

His voice was smooth, low and deep with lingering grief. "The Force shows me a path that my heart is not ready to tread, Master Yoda."

"Clear the Force. Where is the confusion? Which path choose you?"

Sighing, Jinn studied the small creature standing now at eye level. "You felt --" he could not aloud utter the word '_connection' _"-- something, didn't you?"

With a nod Yoda confirmed the suspicion. "Like magnets felt I the power between you and the student Kenobi. Great conduits of the Force are you both. Stubborn and strong-willed are you both. A Force-match. Master can teach the youth much. Student can teach the Master. Formidable allies you will be. Bonded you are."

The phrase brought Jinn's eyebrows together in a glower. "There can be no bond."

With a little smile Yoda's ears twitched. "Stubborn you are," he sighed with a soft little hum. "Felt it I did. Need no more proof to know some myths in truth are based."

"Myth?" He snorted derisively. He would not even comment on the amazing coincidence that Yoda mentioned a bond -- a myth. This was not a Warrior Bond! This was not anything! He could not allow that! "I am not ready for another Padawan. I don't want --" He looked away, unable to reveal his deep doubts even though Yoda probably sensed them already. "I can not abide another betrayal."

Pursing his lips, Yoda nodded his head, pacing a bit on the stone paving, then returning to stand by the cross-legged Master sitting on the cold cobbles. "If Master you became to a student, betray him would you?"

"Never." The response was instant, sharp and certain.

"Even if he is arrogant and --" his nose wrinkled as he searched for a word -- " -- flashy?"

Instead of agreeing with the assessment of the overt ego of the exhibitionist Kenobi, another image came to mind. This one of the young student in the library, holding the book, solidly locking Jinn's gaze. With it came a wispy chill from the Force and the memory of the tingly connection made when they both held the arcane book together for a magical heartbeat.

"Think you must young Kenobi will betray you."

"That's not what I said." Jinn kept his silence. Yoda out-waited him. Finally Qui-Gon continued. "I don't want to take the risk."

Yoda chortled, which earned him a sour look from the other Master. "Unusual that is when coming from you it does." The irony was not lost on the younger Humanoid and Jinn surrendered a grin. Yoda's ears dropped, his face sober. "Dark forces coming, Qui-Gon Jinn they are." The younger Master narrowed his eyes and fought down a shiver. "An imbalance in the Force. Great evil. Jedi will need all strength possible. Is that not so?"

Qui-Gon breathed out a deep sigh. "Yes, I have felt it, too. More attacks against Jedi." He had lost friends -- too many in the last few years. The tide of evil and targeted, specific threats against the Jedi were rising -- even weapons specifically designed to eliminate Jedi. There were more and more initiates dropping out, failing the rigorous training at the Temple. There were more Padawans failing their trials to advance to Knight. His voice dropped, skin growing cold at the remembrance of his own responsibility to this growing dread. "More seduced by the Dark Side."

Yoda patted his shoulder. "Not your fault, Qui-Gon. Many times lecture I do. When believe you the Master?"

"I am sorry, Master Yoda. It takes a great deal of time for the guilt -- the hurt -- to heal."

"The flow of the Force help you it will. Kenobi is your Destiny, within your current of the Force. Healing he will help you. Never regret this you will." The point did not seem to move him. "Always followed the Force have you to the exclusion of all else. Sometimes to your own peril. Which folly it is."

This earned a glare from the younger Master.

"Again I ask you, Master Jinn, which path choose you?"

Tangible, feathery tufts of the connection with the young initiate lingered. "I choose the path of the Force," Jinn responded with quiet certainty.

Yoda gave a nod. "Trust the Force you must. Noble Destiny ahead for Master and Padawan see I. Great your future is together. Warrior Bond it might be."

Jinn fought to hide a smile. "Have you been reading those old fairy tales again, Master?"

His little eyes twinkled. "Tell you not will I, Master Jinn. Still believe in magic do I."

Never one to waste time, Qui-Gon Jinn appeared outside the training rooms early the next morning. The sabre Master addressed his students, offering the standard lecture before students practiced with the low-powered but still formidable weapons. In a final sparing match, Obi-Wan Kenobi and a female Wookie -- the two initiates promoting to Padawans -- would take the first set.

With a sense of smugness Jinn noted the boy seemed to be tired. A restless night pondering the future? It would serve him right, came the ungracious thought. No, Kenobi didn't deserve that. The young man was following the dictates of the Force. Perhaps even all the way back to his long interest in the Warrior Bond? Could Jinn apply that stray thought to his own knowledge of that old myth? It was something to ponder in the long years ahead.

As Kenobi took his place on the mat he shot a glance at Jinn. The Jedi Master had deliberately placed himself in easy view of the student. If the Force wanted him to do something with the boy then Jinn had a right to know what mettle the youth possessed. Nothing like pressure -- the final match, the advancement to Padawan, the mysterious lurking of an intimidating and infamous Master -- to show the true intrinsic integrity of a young man.

Given the cue to start, both initiates bowed, then activated their lightsabres. The Wookie had height, strength and mass on her side. Kenobi had agility, maneuverability and -- yes -- unmistakable style on his side. The battle commenced with several moments of the opponents stalking, assessing and prowling around each other. Obi-Wan impatiently made several swift, sweeping arcs of the sabre and on the last one the Wookie clipped him on the side with the tip of her blade. The sting singed, causing Kenobi to wince and twist, dancing just barely out of the way of a massive stroke of the Wookie's purple blade that was longer than the white light of Obi-Wan's training sabre.

As the conflict continued Qui-Gon sensed the emotions from the boy, lending to an understanding of the strategy behind his flamboyance. The Wookie was distracted by the fancy skips, jumps and flips of the Humanoid, easily giving away her tactics and capabilities. On the weak side of this scheme, Kenobi was expending most of the energy, tiring quickly and inflicting no hits at all, while he had been burned by the purple energy light several times.

Then, with a surge of the Force that Jinn sensed nearly as powerfully as if it had been him in the battle, he felt Obi-Wan feint to the left. Knowing it was a ruse, he watched with glowing appreciation as the boy flipped to the right, slashing his sabre across the neck of the Wookie on the exposed right side of her neck.

The sting was enough to penetrate even the deep fur of the Wookie and she roared, falling to her knees in decisive defeat. Exhausted, panting, Kenobi returned to face his foe, powering off his sabre and giving her a quick nod. Obi-Wan went to the bench at the side of the room to sit with the other initiates. Casting a glance at Qui-Gon, the Master could sense a feeling of contentment and curiosity in the boy. Obi-Wan was pleased -- not arrogant -- with his performance and wondered what Jinn thought about it.

Walking away with a straight face, Qui-Gon went to a conversation alcove down the corridor to think. There was a great deal to assess. Whoever became Obi-Wan's Master would have to be someone with a strong hand, a firm will to countermand the youth's headstrong confidence, pretentiousness and -- his lips twitched in an amused smile -- spirit. Kenobi seemed to possess that in abundance.

With a sigh he stopped the silent pretense. The Force was prompting

-- no -- the Force demanded he take this boy as his Padawan. This was no subtle inspiration, this was a subconscious shout to his soul. He could not deny being virtually commanded back to the Temple, lead to Obi-Wan three times, and strongly feeling the connection between them.

Jinn sat in the corner of the conversation alcove, not easily noticed to passersby. The students would come past here at the end of their training session. As a final test, Qui-Gon wanted to examine the power of the Force one more time. If they really were connected, Obi-Wan would find him. Not that he felt there was a -- link -- a bond, but just in case, this would serve as a little test.

Before long the low murmurs of youthful conversations filled the quiet corridor. One was high-pitched, excited and taunting, the strident voice rising above the rest.

"You always have to show off, Obi-Wan. It was even worse with a Master watching."

"We all saw him studying you." A lower, less irritated voice. "You don't really think he'd pick you as a Padawan, do you? I've heard he's the strictest Master in the Order."

The strident toned youth continued. "You're too much of a show-off for him. If he ever takes another apprentice. I've heard he never will. His last one betrayed him."

The young people stopped in the corridor and Qui-Gon could see their silhouettes. Several crowded around the trim, stiff form of Kenobi. It had not been so long ago in history that Jinn forgot his own initiate days. Most fellow students were decent and likable. Some were harsher personalities. He had endured his own periods of persecution from those who did not appreciate his serious, studious nature or his sometimes rebellious individualism.

Now, even though the barbs were aimed at Kenobi, they managed to sting the not-so-thick skin of the Master in question. Wishing he could see the face of the young Obi-Wan, he really didn't need to. Through their tenuous connection he could feel ripples of defiant, defensive umbrage at the insults. Not that they were hurtful to Kenobi, but that they were insulting Jinn.

"Thank you for that piece of old gossip, Torgon. Fortunately," Obi-Wan stated clearly, slowly, deeply, in his driest tone, "he will not be coming to you for advice. If Master Jinn is looking for an apprentice, I would bet he will stop well before he gets to your door."

The instinctive defense made the older Master smile to himself. He certainly couldn't fault the boy for loyalty. Not that he expected allegiance from this stranger, but it was nice to know he had an ally and at least one being within the Temple would defend his honor.

"You'll see," the high-pitched Torgon assured, then left with his little clan.

When the others were out of sight Kenobi kicked the wall and flung himself into the nearest lounge chair. A moment passed and he slammed

a fist on the arm of the chair. Placing his face in his hands he rubbed fingers through his long hair. Even without the Force Qui-Gon could have sensed the frustration, the irritation, the -- uncertainty? So, this skilled, seemingly confident boy had deeper insecurities than he showed. Complex, but strong, Jinn labeled with appreciation.

Kenobi's head snapped up and he peered into the darkness, directly stabbing Jinn with a stare. Instantly he came to his feet.

"Master."

Sighing, Qui-Gon tried not to be annoyed that even in small things he would not be given an out from this unexpected -- unwanted -- turn of events. "I am not your Master, student Kenobi." The nod was civil and neutral as he stepped into the light.

The boy flinched and bowed his head. "No, you are not, Master Jinn. My apologies."

Jinn was deservedly known as an aloof, stern Jedi. He had never considered himself cruel, but his worst seemed to come out around this boy. That was no defense against incivility. Yet to apologize would encourage the boy that there was some shared future for them -- which there should not be -- but which he could no longer deny.

"May I ask you something, Master Jinn?"

"Yes."

Glancing up, the youth's resolve overcame his uncertainties. "What was your opinion of my trial?"

A spark of the Force flowed between them. Qui-Gon didn't even try to tune it out this time. Neither would he acknowledge it openly, or give any praise to the egotistical -- no, that wasn't right -- the sanguine boy. Arrogant, selfish, ruthless -- those were qualities that fit his second Padawan, not Kenobi. It was instinctive, even defensive to compare them, but Obi-Wan's personality made it nearly impossible for him to do so. There was nothing about the two that was the same, Jinn knew, and if he could not give the boy affection or openness, then he could at least treat him justly.

"It is more important what your sabre Master thought."

Kenobi smiled, eyes sparkling. "At the top of my class, Master. Although I did get points marked down for the overly dramatic slash across the neck." Gingerly he rubbed his tender, singed side. "Not to mention some other marks I was sloppy about receiving."

The Force tingled him, nearly propelling his amusement out. Despite all his best efforts, Jinn could not remain disappointed or even disapproving of the student. "Caution seems to be a lesson you should remember."

Kenobi slightly inclined his head. "As you say, Master," but there was little humility, only a wry lilt in the tone.

In keeping with his unconventional nature, Jinn characteristically approached this matter head-on. Most initiates were brought before

the Council, after their trials, and introduced to their Masters if they had not already met. After a counseling session the Masters then released Master and Padawan to start their partnership together. Impatient, Qui-Gon decided to forgo some of the intermediary steps.

He sighed, acknowledging the boy's stubbornness. Or persistence? Or an understanding and acceptance of something Qui-Gon was unable to admit to himself? "And I am not your Master," he reminded again in his own show of headstrong traits.

"Sorry, Master Jinn."

He gave a nod of acceptance. "There is something I would like to ask you if I may?"

"Anything, Master Jinn." Kenobi stood back and waited. Not in anxiety or contrition, but in a steady, forthright look of anticipation. As if he was ready for anything, but already knew the answer.

That brash self-confidence was challenging to Jinn -- too reminiscent of himself -- and he decided to try a little one-upmanship. "Do you believe in the Warrior Bond, young Kenobi?"

Accepting the provocation with glittering eyes, Obi-Wan considered for a brief moment. "I believe in the Force, Master Jinn. If I ever find myself lucky enough to be Padawan to a noble and wise Jedi Master then I will try my best to establish that Warrior Bond."

The boy was teasing him. Betrayed by the Force, Jinn knew the minute the phrase was spoken by either of them they both felt a confirmation through the Force. The connection was there. Tentative, slight, but unmistakable. With this power between them how would Jinn ever control the headstrong boy? He had a rueful feeling it would be a wild adventure to find out.

Older, wiser, stronger in the Force and infinitely more experienced with cheeky students, Jinn chose to use maximum weapons now to knock the youth off balance. He had to end this on his terms.

"We shall see." His face was stern, his voice neutral. "You are coming with me, young Kenobi. We have an appointment with the Council."

"Master?"

Jinn gestured to the corridor. "We must speak to them about who your Master will be. Have you interviewed to be a Padawan, yet, Kenobi?"

"No." Clearly startled, Obi-Wan stared at the older man. "Master Yoda told me that would be decided today."

Jinn's skin prickled and Kenobi shivered from another shared blast of the Force. Soberly Qui-Gon studied the clear green eyes. "I believe that has already been decided. It's time for us to notify the Council."

The smile on Obi-Wan's face was only a fraction of the joy exhibited in the trembling Force emanating from the boy. "Yes, Master."

They walked the halls in silence until they came to the Council door. A clerk in the reception area quietly, mysteriously, informed them they were expected. The news was amazing to Kenobi and a little startling to the experienced Jedi Jinn. Feeling a flicker of breathless expectation and a smidgen of anxiety shoot out from Obi-Wan, Qui-Gon offered him a thin smile of support. This was not easy for either of them for vastly different reasons. Poised on the brink of a life-changing moment -- on the edge of eternity -- they exchanged knowing glances. This was a trial for both of them and for once the expectant Master and Padawan were on equal setting, uncertain of the future, certain they must face it side by side.

Entering the circular room, Master and student gravitated to the circle in the center, facing Yoda. The Council chamber was the core of power for the twelve Jedi coordinating the Force for the Republic. Outside the heavy traffic of Coruscant whizzed past, a striking counterpoint to the serenity and muted calm of the Jedi foundation.

"Come with a message for us do you Master Qui-Gon Jinn?"

Slightly bowing his head, Jinn wondered at the picture this must present to the Council. A disenchanted, disillusioned Knight/Master -- over forty standard years old and worn by harsh experience. Next to him the fresh-faced, eager, idealistic youth Kenobi, whose eyes shone with awe and heart raced with excitement and anticipation.

"I have, Master Yoda. Today I come before the Council to --" he cleared his dry, unyielding throat. "-- to petition the Council." He was fumbling the formal request language! Jinn, a past master of diplomacy and verbal skill was botching a litany he had memorized decades ago when he was a Knight. Drawing in a deep breath he went on instincts instead of formality. "I believe the Force has directed me to take on a Padawan. Specifically, student Obi-Wan Kenobi."

Offering a brief nod to the youth he folded his hands inside the flowing sleeves of his tunic and almost hoped they would formally reject the request. Almost. With dismay he realized he had reached this point of reluctant acceptance, he almost wanted an apprentice. No, he almost wanted Kenobi -- sidekick, student and constant companion for the next decade or so of their lives -- as his Padawan.

Yoda stared at Kenobi. "What say you to this request student Obi-Wan Kenobi?"

Levelly staring back at the great Jedi, Kenobi's deep, pleasant voice was more serious than Qui-Gon had ever heard it.

"I formally come to the Council and request that I be allowed to become the Padawan of the noble Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn." Yoda's ears twitched at the unconventional embellishments to the nearly-textbook appeal. Plunging in, Kenobi continued with certainty. "I also believe the Force has directed me, Master Yoda. The Force has formed a connection between us and I hope that you will allow me the great honor of being the obedient and diligent Padawan of Master Qui-Gon Jinn."

Qui-Gon felt rather than saw the stares, the startlement of the other Council members, although Yoda displayed only a raising of his eyebrows at the remarkable statement. Completely departing from ritual and form, Kenobi had pressed his case eloquently --and in Jinn's opinion -- in a completely exaggerated display. Flattered, certainly, but a bit annoyed at Obi-Wan's risk, still, the Force attested strongly to everyone in the room the sincerity and truth behind the youth's words. Not only did the Force run strong in Kenobi, it ran true and clear with incredible, undeniable virtue.

In his soul Qui-Gon suddenly felt a stab of an emotion he had never felt before: Uncertainty in his qualifications. Did he have what it took to be the proper Master to this incredible young man? He had failed the apprentice who turned to Darkness. What would he do with this trusting, optimistic boy?

Council members murmured among themselves. Yoda motioned for silence. Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon both held their breaths, the older man realized with some irony. Again, for vastly differing reasons, they were sharing a common emotion.

"Understand you both the depth of this bond you do not yet." The scratchy voice crackled in the silent, sepulture room. Closing his eyes he saw beyond the moment, beyond the time and place. "Bright and difficult your future is. Great are the things you will see and accomplish. Hardships and danger you will face. Trust in the Force. Trust in your bond. Your joy will be unending."

Opening his eyes, Yoda nodded at the two men and grinned. "Suited you are. Rebellion within a match." More seriously, he continued. "Master and Padawan you are until the time of trials for Padawan Kenobi. Train you will at assignment tomorrow. May the Force be with you."

Master and Padawan bowed and exited. As they walked to the lift neither spoke, both sensing the nervousness and unease of the other, both sensing the anticipation of excitement of the unknown ahead.

Once inside the lift Qui-Gon took the lead. He was the Master now and it was time to act like one. Giving Obi-Wan instructions, he told the boy to gather his belongings and join him in his guest quarters. Later, pacing the small living room, Qui-Gon's nerves were unsettled until the boy arrived with a single bag of belongings.

Taking comfort in nominal, ordinary tasks, Jinn ordered the boy to stow the gear in the small bedroom next to his. Then they studied a data screen detailing their first mission. It was at a planet five days from Coruscant and he informed they would take that time to train and join in a working pattern. There would be studies and informal training at all times from Master to Padawan, interspersed with assignments from the Council. It was a big, busy Republic and there was much to do for every Jedi.

With a sigh Obi-Wan leaned back in his chair. "It's exciting and breathtaking, Master." The subliminal current of the Force confirmed his pleased, eager feelings, but his placid, nonchalant exterior strove for mature acceptance. "But I was wondering something."

"Yes, Padawan?" Qui-Gon almost held his breath, waiting for the first in years worth of questions, quizzes and ideas. "What is your question?"

"When can we eat, Master, I'm starving?"

The green eyes were alight and Jinn smirked, caught cold -- again -- by the precocious youth. "We shall give you your first test, Padawan. We'll see if your skills in the kitchen are any match for your flamboyance in sabre duels."

With mock deference, Obi-Wan blandly retorted, "No question, Master, you are bound to be disappointed now."

The evening meal was simple -- bread and fruit -- standard stock for the guess rooms. They ate in silence, cleaned up quickly, and were soon standing by the table, at a loss as to what to do next.

Qui-Gon made a show of examining the youth's hair. "I think we shall need to give you your mark of a Padawan."

As a matter of ceremony one of the first acts of service to his Padawan was the Master's duty of fashioning a Padawan braid for Humanoid Jedi. Traditionally most wore their hair long, tied at the back. Relying on the Force to lend deftness to his fingers Qui-Gon braided the longish strands of sandy hair on the right side of Obi-Wan's head. The braid was short, just barely past the ear, but the shortness was an outward sign of the new Padawan and Master team. Over the next months and years the braid, the confidence, the teamwork, would grow. The rest of the fine, light hair he pulled into a tail high in the back. His second Padawan had worn his hair -- long, dark and shiny -- just like this. Qui-Gon frowned.

"Is something amiss, Master?"

How could he diplomatically get out of that question? "I believe a shorter style would suit you better, Padawan."

The shot of a skeptical glance was enough to let the elder know his prevarication had not been accepted.

Kenobi seemed a little nervous and disappointed. So, there was a bit of vanity in the young man who was probably understandably proud of his attractive hair. As he often did he opted for humor to ease the moment. "As long as you do not sheer it with a lightsabre, Master."

The dare was too much for his belligerent nature. Just to serve the cheeky boy his just deserts, Qui-Gon challengingly took his sabre from the table and activated the singing emerald blade. "Do you doubt my skills are as good as yours with a lightsabre?" The tone held no hint of mercy.

Obi-Wan's expression was nothing but sincere. "Never, Master. I am completely in your hands."

With an adroit flex of his wrist the sizzling blade sliced through the ponytail, leaving hardly enough to be tied. In a stroke of flamboyant expertise Jinn then slashed along the top of Kenobi's head, sheering off the hair to a fractional fuzz on the top. It could

have been a dangerous stunt in less skilled hands -- the deadly energy blade at half power slicing so close to the boy's head and neck. As the hair wafted down in shimmery tufts Obi-Wan spun around, his eyes wide with astonishment.

"I never even felt the heat." He drew in a breath. "You truly are a great Master." The voice and face filled with awe.

Qui-Gon nearly blushed. Now who was the show off?

Whether his face, or the Force betrayed his ironic thought, he did not know. Obi-Wan, however grinned. "A very flashy display of skill, Master. I shall have to remember the technique."

Jinn gave him leave to prepare for bed. After cleaning up Qui-Gon stared out of the viewport, wondering at the incredible transformation that had swept through his staid existence in just two day's time. He marveled at his emotional upheavals and incredible reactions of mirth, annoyance and humility in the few hours he had known this boy. At the fantastic, reverent power of the Force he was astonished -- that it had wrought such a change -- so instantly -- in his life.

At the door of the boy's bedroom Qui-Gon paused, watching the boy, obviously not asleep, laying on the cot. Thinking back to the first time they spoke, Jinn covered a smile with a cough, remembering the dexterous use of the Force, the idealism of the student studying myths. Despite himself, a compliment was on his lips before he could retract it.

"I commend you for a clever use of the Force in the library, Padawan. You are indeed strong in the Force."

"Some of my teachers would probably be impressed that I was using it at all for studying." His face sobered. "I promise to use it wisely, Master, as you direct."

For years Qui-Gon had rejected the thought of tutoring another apprentice because of his own pain from betrayal. Now the responsibility gave him pause for an entirely different reason. This young man was full of promise and power with the Force. Was Jinn ready for this enormous responsibility of guiding and helping him to become a great Knight?

"A question, Master."

Jinn swallowed a sigh. He would have to be firm with the boy. "One more only, Padawan, then it is time to sleep."

"Do you believe in the Warrior Bond, Master?"

Qui-Gon ignored the hope and anticipation in the words, in the face bright with promise. "I believe in the Force, Padawan. That is enough. Good night."

Neutral, expression closed, Obi-Wan gave a nod. "Good night, Master."

In his own sleep chamber Qui-Gon laid on his cot, staring up into the dark. The memory of Obi-Wan's bold eyes -- full of faith and trust in

him -- burned in his mind. Qui-Gon would not deny this challenge, then. With the Force, and Kenobi on his side, he could hardly fail. And one day, he hoped, he would learn to trust with even a slight element of the certainty his Padawan showed from his side of this incredible bond.

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